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ABSTRACT

The meaning fathers have in the lives of women as they are growing up was investigated. Women's perceptions of their fathers on several factors were measured to determine how these perceptions differed with father loss, cause and time of loss, perception of parental marital relationships, and presence of an older brother. Questionnaires were completed by three groups of women, i.e., those from intact homes, those whose parents were divorced, and those whose father had died while they were children. Women from divorced homes were, on the average, twice as dissatisfied with their parents' marriage as those in the other two groups, and portrayed fathers as more encouraging of autonomy in their offspring. Dead fathers were portrayed as having been more child-centered, controlling, intrusive, and less nonenforcing than divorced fathers. Women from intact homes reported their fathers had used withdrawal of relations significantly more often than their absent counterparts. (Author/HLM)

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YOUNG WOMEN'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL SENSE OF FATHER AND PARENTAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AND THEIR RELATION TO PATERNAL LOSS

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YOUNG WOMEN'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL SENSE OF FATHER AND PARENTAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIP AND THEIR RELATION TO PATERNAL LOSS

Susan Darlington

Until recently, the role of the father in child development has been overlooked and virtually ignored in the literature. The increase in divorce, and the father's subsequent absence from the home, however, has increased the interest in examining his influence or lack of influence. While there are theories and numerous studies examining the effects of father presence and absence on males, very little research has addressed the importance of the father - daughter relationship in the psychological development of women (Biller, 1976; Lamb, 1976). Additionally, studies on the effects of father absence on children often fail to consider the type of father lost. Moreover, when perceptions of father have been examined, subjects with absent fathers have been excluded. This study attempted to examine the meaning father has for women as they are growing up by measuring women's perceptions of their father on a number of factors to determine how this sense varies as a function of father loss, cause and time of loss, perception of parental marital relationships, and presence of an older brother. The use of women's perceptions instead of direct observations follows the frequently expressed theory that a person's perception or phenomenological sense of a situation has more influence on the person's behavior and/or emotion than its objective reality (Lang, Papenfus & Walters, 1976).

METHOD

Questionnaire reliabilities and scales' relationships were computed on responses of 181 women drawn from four universities. Three groups of women were compared - women from intact, widow's and divorcee's homes. Subjects were asked to respond to Schaffer's (1965) 18 scale Childrens' Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI), Phenomenological Fathering Scale (PFS), and Perception of Parental Marital Relationship Scale (PPMRS). The Recall of Parental Divorce Scale (RPDS), and Perception of Parental Death Scale (PPDS) were used where appropriate.

All 133 women from intact homes completed the questionnaire in conjunction with class requirements. Of the loss groups, 3/4 of the women were solicited through a newspaper advertisement, all were paid; the rest came from classrooms. Women filling out the questionnaire were between the ages of 18 and 22, had a father in the home at least until the age of 4, were Caucasion, and had never been in psychotherapy. One-way analyses of variance were performed.

RESULTS

Factor analyses indicated significant differences between 3 groups (widows', divorcees', and intact homes' daughters) on 3 of the 20 scales and showed trends on 5 others. Differences on the PPMRS (Perception of Parental Marital Relationship Scale-Discrepancy form) were highly significant ($p. \leq .0072$). Women from divorced homes were on the average very dissatisfied with their parents' marriage as compared to intact and widowed home daughters. Divorcees' daughters portrayed fathers who were more extreme in autonomy-granting ($p. \leq .007$) and less possessive ($p. \leq .037$) than their intact and widowed home counterparts.

Means for Significant Differences

	*PPMRS Discrepancy Scale	**Extreme Autonomy	**Possessiveness
Group intact	12.46	9.28	9.84
Death	13.37	11.85	9.2
Divorce	25.55	7.75	11.39

* The higher the score the higher the dissatisfaction

** The higher the score the more not like the father

The 5 trends were significant when factor analyses were done solely on the 2 loss groups (death and divorce), while 3 scales with significant differences remained the same as the analyses previously. The 4 additional significant differences between women with paternal loss emerged on the childcenteredness ($p. \leq .028$), control ($p. \leq .039$), intrusiveness ($p. \leq .018$), and nonenforcement ($p.$ .015) scales. Dead fathers were portrayed as more child centered, controlling, intrusive and less nonenforcing than divorced fathers.

Sample Items of Scales on Which Significant Differences Were Found

Perception of Parents' Marital Relationship Scale (PPMRS)Discrepancy Form

Scored 1 to 6 always. Each item responded to twice, once for actual or real and once for ideal.

My parents were very close.

If there was a family problem, both could agree on a solution.

My mother was very close to her family.

Phenomenological Fathering Scale (PFS) Discrepancy Score (Scored the same as the PPMRS)

He always picked me up on time.

He was warm and snuggly.

He spanked me.

Scales from Schaffers Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory

Responded to by: 1 - like, 2 - somewhat like, 3 - not like.

Childcenteredness

Makes his whole life center about his children.

Is always thinking of things that will please me.

Makes me feel like the most important person in his life.

Possessiveness

Seems to regret that I am growing up and am spending more time away from home.

Wishes I would stay at home where he could take care of me.

Control

Insists I must do exactly as I'm told.

I have certain jobs to do and am not allowed to do anything else until they are done.

Intrusiveness

Asks other people what I do away from home.

Keeps a careful check on me to make sure I have the right kind of friends.

Withdrawal of Relations

Will not talk to me when I displease him.

Is less friendly with me if I don't see things his way.

Extreme Autonomy

Allows me to go out as often as I please.

Lets me dress in any way I please.

Another trend in the initial 3 group analyses emerged significant when paternal loss women were compared as a single group to no-loss women. Women with fathers in the home reported their fathers used withdrawal of relations significantly more often ($p. \leq .03$) than their absent counterparts.

Finally, there was a significant difference in the report of discrepancy between ideal and real father for early and late loss women in the PFS ($p. \leq .05$). Women with early loss (between the ages of 4 and 7) reported a more ideal father, and less discrepancy between their report of how their father actually was and how they wished he would have been, than the late loss group (between the ages of 8 and 12).

SUMMARY

In summary, women from widowed, divorced and intact homes were compared. Women from divorced homes reported more dissatisfaction with their parents' marriage, a father who was more granting of extreme autonomy and less possessive, childcentered, intrusive, and controlling. Women with paternal loss reported a more ideal father. Both groups with paternal loss reported less use of withdrawal of relations as a punishment used by their father.

Relevant to these findings is a thorough and rare study contrasting girls from widowed, divorced, and intact homes, Hetherington (1972, 1973) noted highly significant differences in verbal and nonverbal behavior. In the presence of a male interviewer, adolescent girls from widowed homes sat the farthest away, made limited eye contact, used closed body posture and answered questions minimally. Their counterparts from divorced homes were an exaggerated opposite in pursuant seductive style, as demonstrated by choosing the closest seat, extensive verbal response and eye contact, and open body position. Intact home women were in the middle on such behaviors. These results in combination with this study's findings of the difference between perception of father suggests divorcees' daughters behaviors may be an attempt to gain the attention of an ignoring, uninvolved father.

In other words, a divorced father is reported as more granting of extreme autonomy, rather than merely autonomy - a scale on which there were no significant differences. This paternal lack of control and interest in friends, curfew, and dress might easily be felt as neglect, and disinterest in conjunction with the report of less paternal possessiveness, less childcenteredness, more nonenforcing and less controlling than the divorced father's deceased counterpart. Finally, the author suggests that part of the difference may be due to developmental changes in parenting. The divorced father's continuing parenting may move toward less involvement as his daughter matures, hence a different memory than that of a woman whose father died while more control was appropriate . This argument is somewhat nullified however, by the similarity between perceptions of the daughters of intact and widowed women. The trend is, however, for the widowed daughters to report their fathers as slightly more extreme in style.

The similarity of both loss groups in reporting less paternal withdrawal of relations as a means of punishment compared to intact home fathers suggests a denial or minimizing of abandonment feelings. Acknowledgement of such a punishment for women dealing with paternal loss could be greatly more threatening than the acknowledgement of the mere temporary withdrawal of an intact home father.

Finally, the difference between early and late loss groups suggests that early loss groups may have a more idealized paternal image. This could indicate that for the death group, the earlier the loss the more extreme the report of a highly attentive controlling father.

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